

THE TOLEDO MUSEUM OF ART  
FOUNDED BY EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY



# *Art in Crystal*

*A Historical Exhibition of*  
**LIBBEY GLASS**

1818 - 1951



*Edward Drummond Libbey*  
1854 - 1925

# ART IN CRYSTAL

A HISTORICAL EXHIBITION OF LIBBEY GLASS

1818 - 1951

WHEN EDWARD DRUMMOND LIBBEY founded the Toledo Museum of Art in 1901 he was already a long established figure in the world of glassmaking. It seems, therefore, appropriate to inaugurate the Museum's Fiftieth Anniversary celebration with an exhibition of Libbey Glass. This historical exhibition of Libbey Glass from 1818 to 1951 is presented by The Toledo Museum of Art with the cooperation of the Owens-Illinois Glass Company and its Libbey Glass Division. More than two hundred pieces of Libbey historical glassware were presented to the Toledo Museum in honor of its Fiftieth Anniversary by the Owens-Illinois Glass Company, and are shown in this Exhibition together with its many previous gifts.

The ancestor of the Libbey Glass Company, which has thrived and grown here in Toledo since 1888, was the New England Glass Company of Cambridge, Mass., incorporated in 1818. It produced fine glass from the beginning, became known as "one of the most extensive flint glass manufactories in the country, producing every variety of plain, mould and the richest cut glass, as Grecian lamps, chandeliers for churches, vases, antique and transparent lamps for domestic supply and exportation to the West Indies and South America."

Among the early wares shown in this exhibition are examples of cut glass—the earliest piece a decanter of 1827, the most striking, the tall covered apothecary jar of ruby overlay with elaborate allover pattern; pressed glass salt cellars of 1830; and many pieces of cut, engraved, pressed, and other types of decorated glass made at the New England Glass Company.

In 1872, William L. Libbey and his son, Edward Drummond Libbey, became associated with the New England Glass Company, and in 1880 took over the business which then became known as the New England Glass Works, Wm. L. Libbey and Son, Props. The popular taste of the period welcomed rich and striking colors, and under the direction of

Edward Drummond Libbey (William L. Libbey died in 1883) new types of glassware were invented, the best known being Amberina, Pomona, Peachblow and Agata.

The most popular was the Amberina ware, the ruby color achieved by the use of gold in the glass mixture. The rich ruby red shading to pale amber was developed by reheating parts of the object. A number of pieces of Amberina are shown in the exhibition, including the first piece made, which had been owned by William L. Libbey. Examples of Peachblow, Pomona and Agata are also shown, though only a few pieces are available today.

By the late 1880's, natural gas had been discovered in northwestern Ohio, and Toledo business men were eager to exploit the advantages of the new fuel. Mr. Libbey was invited to move his glass plant here. On August 18, 1888, he arrived with a large party of glass workers, who paraded to the new glass plant which was prepared for them. A banner carried by them hailed Toledo as "the future glass center of the world."

First known as the New England Glass Company, Wm. L. Libbey and Son, Props., as it had been at Cambridge, in 1893 the company was incorporated as the Libbey Glass Company. It continued to make the same types of glass as had been made in the East, especially the heavy cut glass then in vogue.

In 1893 the great Columbian Exposition in Chicago gave Libbey an opportunity to make his newly located company known to the world. A \$100,000 glass plant was built on the fair grounds so that spectators could see glass being formed, cut, and polished. Many of the cut or engraved articles were sold or distributed as souvenirs. Nearly 2,000,000 visitors to the Fair saw Libbey Glass being made, and as a result of the tremendous interest the success of the company was assured. For the



Cut glass covered urn, crystal with gold-ruby overlay. New England Glass Company, 1845



Pressed glass compote and pitcher, Sharp Diamond pattern. New England Glass Company, 1865-70



Amberina fluted bowl with twisted handle; Pomona cream pitcher. New England Glass Company, about 1885

next twenty-five years Libbey cut glass was proudly shown in millions of American homes. To the sharp clarity of the glass itself, the elaborate designs cut by expert workmen added flashing brilliance. Every conceivable object was made of cut glass in addition to tableware, including lamps and tables.

A Gold Medal winner of the Exposition may be seen in this exhibition—the Punch Bowl and Cups handsomely engraved with a hunting scene. The exquisite workmanship of the bowl welcomes a magnifying glass for the artist-engraver has included a wealth of detail.

Another remarkable item from that World's Fair is a glass dress made of fine spun glass fibers woven on a warp of silk thread, which was presented to the Princess Eulalia, Infanta of Spain, in a ceremony that attracted nationwide attention.



*Libbey punch bowl and cups with polished engraving of hunting scenes.  
Gold Medal, Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893.*

Libbey Glass again received medals and awards at the St. Louis Exposition of 1904. The cut glass Table was a feature of the St. Louis Fair, but the largest and most publicized piece was the Punch Bowl, shown here with its matching cups. This crystal clear, brilliantly cut piece measures twenty-five inches in diameter and is twenty-four inches high. Like the facets of a cut gem the thousand small polished planes



*Libbey cut glass table, made in three sections; diameter of top 28 inches. Shown at St. Louis World's Fair, 1904*

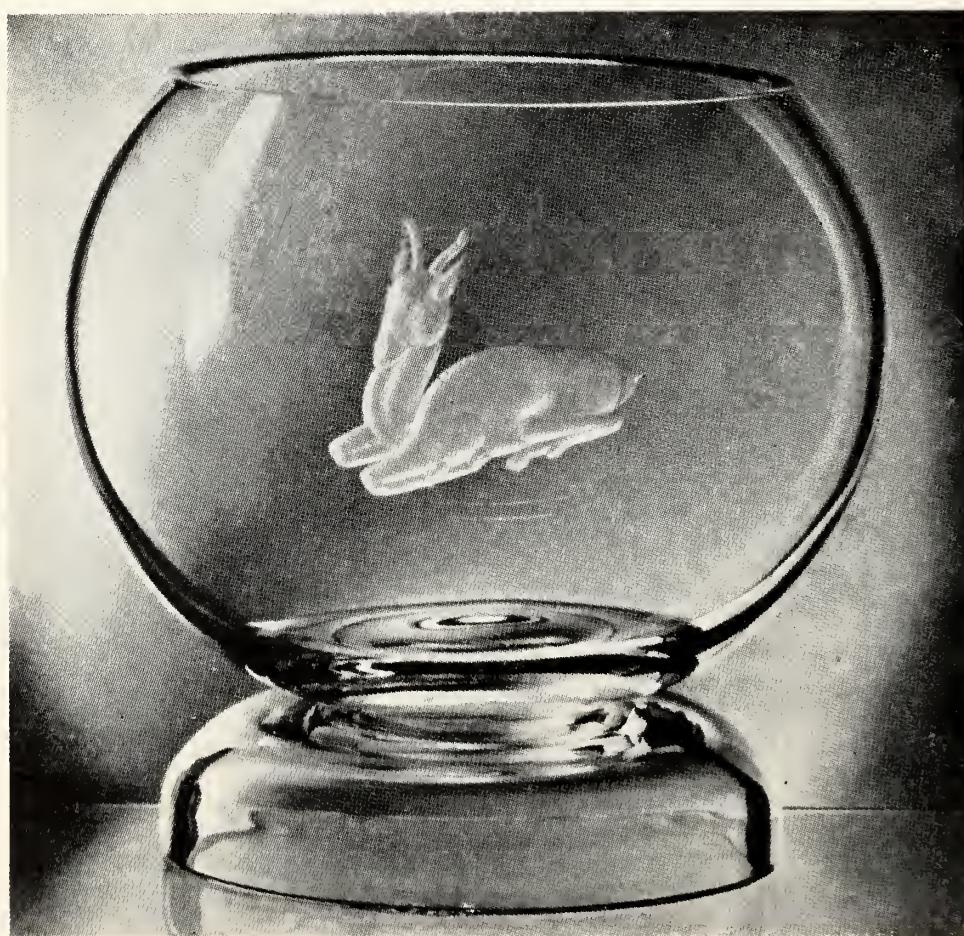
of the surface reflect light in terms of color. The master craftsman who cut this bowl, John Rufus Denman, has only recently retired from the Libbey Glass Company.

Coincident with the making of fine handblown wares, cut, engraved or plain, came a revolutionary development in the methods of glass-making. Until 1900 all glass had been handblown, molded or pressed by a few skilled craftsmen. Michael Owens, a foreman in the Libbey plant, thought it might be possible to blow bottles automatically. By investing money in Owens' idea, encouraging him personally, and advising him from his profound technical knowledge of glass manufacturing, Mr. Libbey aided Owens in building the first wholly automatic glass blowing machine. This invention and subsequent developments of similarly automatic machines brought about tremendous progress toward economical production of bottles and later, tumblers and even stemware,

in great quantity. The use of machines did not impair the quality of design. For several years designers and craftsmen attended the Museum School of Design classes, where they learned to integrate beautiful form with the simple functional objective, and produce glassware which reached a wide market.

Following the decline in popularity of the heavy cut glass, the Libbey company continued to make fine handblown wares with delicate crystal cutting, always retaining its reputation for fine quality of material and workmanship. The styles of the years between 1920 and 1940 are well represented in this exhibition.

Shortly before World War II, Libbey introduced a line of simple, beautifully designed crystal glass, called Modern American. Included were exquisite, thin-blown stem pieces and heavy decorative bowls, vases, and candle holders, in both contemporary and traditional designs.



*Libbey Modern American bowl, made about 1940*

With the entry of the United States into the war, Libbey's hand shop was engaged in producing radar bulbs and other electronic glass-ware essential to the war effort. The Modern American line was necessarily abandoned.

In 1942, culminating a period of research directed toward determin-

ing consumer preferences and improving the methods of marketing glassware, Libbey introduced a new concept to the field of glassware—its prepackaged Hostess Sets, consisting of eight color-decorated tumblers in attractive gift boxes. Prepackaging was quickly adopted by other manufacturers in the home accessory field, and is now a familiar merchandising device.

At the end of World War II, Libbey recognized the growing trend toward informal living. Accordingly, the Company asked its designers to develop a series of stemware patterns to conform with the trend. In 1949, the first of these prepackaged stemware sets was placed on the market, and additional patterns followed in 1950. These current stemware lines accord with the old New England policy of "volume production of a popular commercial product . . . devising of articles of superior metal" even to "embellishing them with facile cutting . . ." They are all in the moderate price range, adaptable in most cases with



*Libbey's Diamond Cut pattern tableware, to be introduced in 1951*

either contemporary or traditional backgrounds, and planned for durability as well as beauty.

So today, Libbey, rich in tradition, and with 133 years of experience in the art of glassmaking, has developed the modern technique of producing high quality glassware which retains the intrinsic beauty typical of old New England handmade ware, yet is moderate enough in price for every homemaker to own.

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The Toledo Museum of Art expresses its sincere appreciation to those who have helped build the collection of New England and Libbey glass by gifts of fine pieces, and to the lenders of glass and other objects for this exhibition.

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